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*On Gompertz's Law of Mortality.* By PROFESSOR DE MORGAN.

I HAVE a suspicion that Mr. Edmonds intends the fifteen pages on the "Law of Human Mortality," which appear in the last Number of this *Journal*, to stand in place of an answer to my remarks "On an unfair suppression of due acknowledgment to the writings of Mr. Benjamin Gompertz," printed in the July Number; for though no allusion is made to the charge, still less statement of it or answer to the evidence produced, there is one mention of me which looks so like a distortion of my paper, that I think the suspicion is justified. Mr. Edmonds says (p. 181), "Mr. De Morgan, in his office of self-constituted judge between Mr. Gompertz and me, overlooks this important error . . ." Now, though my paper does not deal with the truths or errors of either, but only with the question whether Mr. Edmonds's mention of Mr. Gompertz was suppressive; and though I never said, and certainly never thought, that there was or could be any question pending between Mr. Gompertz and Mr. Edmonds; and though I was not the judge, either self-constituted or otherwise, but only the promoter of an accusation of unfair suppression for others to judge of;—there is in the quotation that remote likeness to an account of my proceeding which often exists between that which cannot be answered and that which it is convenient to substitute for it. Some acute adviser seems to have whispered, "When you cannot answer what needs answer, answer something else, and keep what you ought to answer out of sight; this will do for all who are to see only one side, and nothing will do for those who are to see both." I shall make two short remarks, and then leave the whole to those who have read the whole.

It will be asked, in turning over page after page, "What has all this talk about the better and worse of this and that method to do with the year 1832 and the question whether the account then given by Mr. Edmonds was, or was not, an unfair suppression of what had been done by Mr. Gompertz?" What did Mr. Edmonds *then* bring forward? What *had* Mr. Gompertz brought forward? What is there in what Mr. Edmonds then brought forward which will redeem his description of Mr. Gompertz's method from the imputation of unfair suppression? If Mr. Edmonds had given all the description he has now given, weak as it is, there would have been foolish and unfounded self-assertion, but at least there would not have been suppression. With the contents of Mr. Edmonds's

paper I have nothing to do ; and this because no account he may *now* give, be it true or be it false, can affect the question whether what he *then* gave was or was not unfair suppression. This want of allusion to my accusation relieves me from all necessity of further rejoinder.

Secondly : the process of bringing Dr. Price into the paper is one which has been repeated many and many a time. When A is charged with dealing unfairly with the writings of B, he tries to prove—sometimes he does prove—that he has dealt just as unfairly with C. Dr. Price calls attention to the manner in which the Holy-Cross data and others exhibit the periods of infancy, manhood, and old age. Mr. Edmonds calls this a *discovery*, and then adds, that, “to perfect his discovery,” he should have remarked “that the rate was *constant* throughout each of the periods.” There was no discovery in what Dr. Price *did* remark, and as to what he *should* have remarked, all we can say is, not that it *does* prove a discovery, but that it *would have* done so if the remark *had been* made. O! these auxiliary verbs! What queer auxiliaries they sometimes are! The introduction of Dr. Price and Mr. Gompertz, as a pair of imperfect predecessors to Mr. Edmonds, can only be explained thus:—Dr. Price was no predecessor at all; Mr. Gompertz was a full and entire predecessor. Take the mean, and each of them was half a predecessor. The policy of such an introduction is of a very questionable stamp, though, no doubt, there is assurance enough in it for a whole life.

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[We have considered this question with a good deal of care, and we cannot but think that there is great truth and justness in the remarks which Professor De Morgan has thought fit to make upon it. When Mr. Edmonds admits “that the honour belongs to Mr. Gompertz of first discovering that some connexion existed between tables of mortality and the algebraic expression  $a^x$ ,” it seems to us that there is an end of the matter. What else of any moment in connexion with it has been discovered? The giving another form to an expression or another phase to an hypothesis already suggested, cannot be looked upon as a discovery. Mr. Edmonds has applied or made use of Mr. Gompertz's suggestion or “discovery” with great ingenuity, neatness, and effect. We do not see how it can be said with truth that he has done more than this. Of the less commendable features of his work we say nothing.—ED. A. M.]

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